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A PRIVATE LETTER *Encl.*

P
TO THE

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS,

ON THE

SUBJECT OF

THE

PUBLIC BUILDINGS

OF THE

UNITED STATES

AT

WASHINGTON,

FROM

B. HENRY LATROBE,

SURVEYOR OF THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

WASHINGTON CITY:

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1901

A LETTER
ON THE
SUBJECT OF
THE
PUBLIC BUILDINGS, &c.

WASHINGTON, Nov. 28, 1866.

SIR,

THE report on the state of the public buildings, which it is my duty to lay annually before the President of the United States for the information of Congress, must necessarily be confined only to the *result* of those measures, which under his direction have been pursued towards their progress or completion. The explanations which enter into this statement cannot be very diffusive; nor can they possibly be made to satisfy every enquiry which the actual view of the work suggests. It has always been my wish therefore to exhibit to the individual members of Congress the works themselves, and orally to account to them for the object and expense of the construction which has been adopted. A great variety of circumstances however have always rendered even this difficult; and at the present time—when the

disappointment which many members will feel in their expectation to sit in the permanent Hall of the House makes this personal explanation peculiarly desirable to me,—the circumstances of my family are such, that I cannot, consistently with my feelings or duties, be present at Washington during the early part of the session.

I have therefore ventured to step so far out of the usual course, as to address to you this letter, in which,—offering to you my respect individually as a member of the National Legislature—I may, in a style and to an extent of which an official communication would not admit, enter into more minute explanations, and lay before you, not only the facts relative to the public buildings, but my reasonings and opinions upon them.

It is not necessary to be very intimately acquainted with the means of erecting large public buildings, to have observed that many difficulties must here necessarily impede their progress, some of which arise from the manner in which the appropriations have been made, the rest, from the present state of this city. The first and greatest of these has been the uncertainty of the continuance of the work beyond the year, for which an appropriation is actually made,—the effects of the former management of the public works, and the local circumstances of the city and its neighborhood cause the remainder.

The funds originally assigned for the erection of the public buildings were to arise from the sale of the public property in the city. As it was generally supposed that these might be perfectly sufficient for their compleat erection, building artisans in every branch of the business flocked to the place, and I am not informed that any difficulty was experienced under the management of the commissioners in procuring workmen in any num-

ber required. The extent in which both the public and private quarries have been worked in the short period which has elapsed since the first commencement of the buildings here, proves also, that there was no want of force applicable to that important department. Had the original fund been as commensurate to its object as was expected, the situations of all those engaged in the works would have been permanent, at least until all the public works were finished. On the time, during which a public building will continue to employ workmen, some reasonable calculation can be made; and in such extensive works, as the Capitol, the President's House, and the Public Offices,—to which the sanguine views of the original promoters of this city expected many others to succeed,—there appeared to be employment for so great a length of time, as to give encouragement to the settlement of many mechanics in the city who looked to them almost entirely for support. The stimulus was powerfully felt;—it brought hither many of the best workmen on the continent, and enticed others from eligible situations in Europe. Many brought valuable property, and most of them valuable knowledge and experience with them; so that during the most promising term of the infancy of these works, Washington might boast of artisans unrivalled in the United States.

When however the original funds declined, and at last almost entirely failed, it became necessary in some instances to contract the scale on which the buildings had been first projected, in more, to desist from any progress in such as were not absolutely necessary to be completed before the removal of the Seat of Government, at the time prescribed by law.

The natural consequences of these measures were, that all those who were thrown out of em-

ploy, and had not fixed themselves to the soil by permanent improvements of lots, left the city to seek employment elsewhere. A great number, however, who had vested their all, perhaps the earnings of a hard spent life in the place, could not prudently leave it; and from these men in a great measure the facilities were obtained which were offered to the recommencement of the work on the public buildings, when special appropriations for that object were made by Congress.

When the appropriation of 50,000 dollars was made by Congress in the year 1803, and I was appointed to the direction of the public works, the President's House was scarcely in a habitable state; the roads between the public buildings required great repairs, and that part of the south wing of the Capitol in which the House of Representatives then sat was in such a state as to require rebuilding from the very foundation. Neither in the nature of the work which could be done that season, nor in the extent of the appropriation was there any thing which could recal to the city those artisans who had before left it, or invite new ones to seek here their fortunes. It was however necessary to enter into new contracts for freestone, and to open again the neglected quarries.

There is an island in the river Acquia, which belongs to the public, exclusively of one square acre owned by Mr. Stuart. On inspection of the quarries on this island it was judged that they could not possibly be opened advantageously without exhausting so large a portion of the appropriation as to diminish injuriously the amount which could be expended on the buildings. Contracts therefore with individuals were made; and as the re-opening of the quarries must necessarily be attended with a large first expense, a very great advance of the price to be paid for the stone

was the effect. This rise was from an average of 6 dollars per ton to \$ 7. 66 in 1803, and since 1805 to 9 dollars per ton.

In the year 1804 an additional 50,000 were appropriated. This appropriation was so long doubtful, and came so late, that no timely preparations could be prudently made to work the quarries in force, and the contractors for freestone were not willing to risk the very large additional supply then required even at the former price.

I therefore made an attempt to open the public quarry. This produced an accommodation with the private quarriers, and, as it was very evident that without an expenditure much exceeding the proposed advance on stone, no *fine* stone could be obtained from the island,—it was judged best to agree to a small advance in the price, and the principal supply was again procured from individuals. The stone quarried by the public proved of advantage in the interior of the building, and was obtained rather below the contract price. In 1805 the sum of 110,000 dollars was voted applicable to the south wing of the Capitol, and 20,000 to the other public works. The contracts for freestone were again renewed with individuals—with some variation, and the work in the public quarry entirely intermitted. In 1806 an appropriation of 40,000 was made. The stones required this season were chiefly of very large size, and an advance on the largest size was agreed to under private contracts.

Now had it been foreseen that the sum of 250,000 dollars would be appropriated by Congress to the public work between the years 1803 and 1806, there cannot be a moment's hesitation in saying, that either such an expenditure would have been made in opening the public quarries on the island as to have procured the necessary free-

stone at a much lower rate than the public have paid for it, or that such preparations would have been made by private quarriers,—especially by Messrs. Cock and Brent, on whom the public have been able to place the greatest dependance,—as to have enabled them not only to have delivered the stone at a lower rate, but in better time for the work; and that the south wing of the Capitol would at the present moment have been completed, may be asserted with the fullest confidence.

On this head I beg leave to add a further explanation.

Between the great mass of rock on the island of Acquia and the deep water of the creek is a soft marsh. Through this marsh a canal has been formerly cut, now much choaked up, which is barely sufficient to convey the stone by means of a scow to the vessels which bring it up to the city. From the quarry to the canal the stone must be carted. Therefore between the quarry and the vessel, the stone must be thrice loaded and twice unloaded. If the public work were sufficiently certain, it would be highly advisable and very easy to erect a rail road across the marsh where it is narrow, to a part of the creek below the island. The rail waggons would take up the stone at the quarry, and unload it in the vessel. By this means, there is no manner of doubt, but that—if the quarries on the island should turn out well,—the stone could be procured, even including the expense of the rail way, at least 25 per cent. cheaper than at present.

I have said, “if the stone should turn out well.” I must here remark, that all these quarries are subject to very great and very sudden variation, and that sometimes—after a large expenditure in getting a good face of rock to work upon, which promises an immense mass of excellent stone,—on

removing a few tons, the rest will turn out to be mere sand, unfit for any permanent purpose.—Quarrying in this stone is therefore a business of hazard. And on this account, I have had the approbation of the President of the United States in forming contracts with individuals, *for stone to be delivered, and to be inspected in the city*,—on which little or no risk is incurred, although it sometimes happens, that the stone falls to pieces in drying, after being for some time delivered.

The same advantages which would result to the public from the certainty that the public quarries would be worked for more than one year, would have accrued to the individual contractors in the preparations they might have made, to get their quarries into such order as to be able to work them advantageously. They would be able to sell their stone much cheaper. At present the disadvantages under which some of the quarries are worked, are such as to deprive them of that profit which the high price appears to promise.

But the greatest disadvantage under which the contractors labor, on account of the uncertainty and lateness of the appropriations, and by which the public suffer in a still greater degree than they do, arises from the following circumstance.

It is customary to hire all the laborers, who are to be hired in this part of the union, on or about the 1st of January in every year,—and for the term of one year. This day brings to market annually the greatest part of the labor which is not employed in the regular course of agriculture, and those who depend upon hired labor, then supply themselves. Soon after the 1st of January the price of laborers rises very considerably, and continues to rise every succeeding month. If at that time,—(and it would be the same were the

public quarries to be worked)—the quarriers had a view of the probable quantity of stone required for the ensuing season, the labor which they would hire would be made adequate to raise this quantity, and the time of supply being limited, the public would not be disappointed. But as hitherto the appropriations have not only been uncertain, as to their existence, but have been voted late in the session, no prudent quarrier could possibly at a certain expense prepare for an uncertain event : and therefore, when the appropriations have been made, and the order for stone given, the quarriers have been obliged either to hire hands at advanced wages, to forward the supply, or to delay the supply until the few hands they had procured, at a risk, could furnish it.

To this latter circumstance it is principally owing that the completion of the south wing has been rendered impossible. The stone required for the recess, which should have been in the yard in August last, was delivered only a few days ago : and though I ought perhaps to take it for granted that the contractor who has thus occasioned so great a disappointment, had at least so much regard to his own interest as to use the greatest exertions to furnish the stone, and though there is at least great plausibility in the excuse he offers for his failure,—for the facts, of late notice, and difficulty of procuring hands are with him,—yet the public loss is not the less on that account.

The difficulties attending the procuring of freestone, though they have been the greatest with which we have had to combat, are by no means the only ones. An appropriation limited by the *season*—not by the quantity of work which the building requires, has this disadvantage : It naturally induces those under whose direction the President has placed its expenditure, to execute all the work,

of which it can defray the expense, before the winter sets in, and for this reason,—that, as soon the succeeding appropriation is made, it may find as much work finished and the building in as forward a state as possible. The annual uncertainty to which the workmen are thus reduced,—whether they may count upon work and support for their families through the winter, and early in the spring—operates most fatally upon our being supplied freely and easily with the workmen we want. The doubt which has annually hovered over the very existence of the city, as the seat of government, has extended throughout the United States, and it is very difficult to persuade artisans of good moral characters as well as abilities, to work here, at the risk of being obliged to return to the place they had left at a season when work is nowhere to be easily procured. The wages we have been obliged therefore to pay, especially this last summer, are higher than are paid elsewhere, and than we should pay here, were our work more certain.

In the above remarks I have confined myself to the branch of building which in expence and difficulties is the most prominent,—the work in freestone. But the uncertainty of appropriation has thrown difficulties in our way in other respects, and has caused very great expense which might have been saved. We have often been obliged in the early part of the season, to discharge for a time most of our masons and bricklayers for want of a supply of building stone and bricks, and,—though it may occasion a smile,—yet it is a fact, that in one instance, a kiln was pulled to pieces by our people, in spite of the opposition of the brick maker, while yet hot, because they would not be discharged while it was cooling, and some of them got severely burned by their impatience.

I mention these circumstances to show how this uncertainty has operated on the supply of materials, and on their price. On the work itself its effect was not less injurious. In the year 1803, the foundations of the external walls were condemned and pulled down. The center building occupied by the House of Representatives remained standing,—because, in the opinion of many, a further appropriation appeared at least doubtful. The difficulty of working in the narrow space round that building can scarcely be conceived, and as the House met in December, all our men were of course discharged before that time. In 1804 the session concluded in March, and then first could our works commence. Much time was lost in pulling down and removing the old building, and before any new work could be begun. However, the progress made that year was great, considering all the disadvantages we labored under.

In 1805 it became absolutely necessary to make an appropriation which should nearly if not quite complete the building of the south wing, and on the requisition of the committee of the House to whom the matter was referred, I made an estimate of the sum which would accomplish this object. It amounted to 109,600 dollars for the body of the wing, and 25,200 for the recess containing the stair cases and communications.—The sum of 110,000 dollars was appropriated to the south wing, and 20,000 dollars to the other public buildings. As I had distinguished the recess from the south wing, the omission to appropriate for that part appeared to forbid its erection. But the plan of the building was necessarily such, that the whole area of the south wing was required for the Hall of the House of Representatives. The external walls therefore could receive no sup-

port from internal walls :—The south, east and west walls had been built so solidly and were so strengthened in the angles by the stair cases of the galleries, that there could be no danger of their giving way to the pressure of the vaults,—but the north wall which, in relation to the whole building, is an internal wall, and the support of which depended upon the recess, had not been calculated to stand alone. It was already carried up one story, and no alteration of consequence could be made. Yet the intended thickness of the upper part was increased, and this wall was, before the erection of the recess during the present year, the most extraordinary piece of masonry, which I have ever seen in any country,—being an unsupported mass of 120 feet in length, 80 feet in height, and at an average not 4 feet in thickness. Against the lower part of this wall, a tier of arches pressed outwards, and in fact,—although no piece of masonry in excellence of materials and fidelity of workmanship ever exceeded it,—it yielded so as to overhang about three inches. This fact may now, that it is immoveably and forever fixed in its place by the erection of the recess,—be mentioned without exciting alarm,—but to construct large works in this manner, is not advantageous to the public, and is neither pleasant nor safe to the architect. In consequence of the increased thickness of the wall, 400 perches of masonry were required which ought not to have been necessary.

The freedom with which I have pointed out the injurious effect of the manner in which appropriations were made for the public works, and especially for the Capitol,—cannot possibly be intended to offend. The facts on which my opinion rests are now perhaps for the first time before you : but had they at first been known, it is not impro-

bable that the same course would have been pursued, because it was the natural result of the doubts which have prevailed as to a question of infinitely greater importance ;—whether the Seat of the National Legislature ought to continue at Washington ?—With this great question I do not in the smallest degree wish or intend to connect any of my observations, but to confine them within the circle of my professional duties, which are to obey the directions of the President of the United States, in forwarding by every possible means the faithful construction of the public works committed to my charge. And this duty I consider myself as performing, when I give to you such information, on the subject, as will enable you to judge of all its difficulties.

During the last session, the extremely inconvenient situation of the House of Representatives in the Library, created a very great impatience in all the members to occupy their new Hall at the next session. When an evil is felt, nothing is so natural as to look for its cause, and its remedy. Some of the causes of the unfinished state of the south wing, were said to lie in the conduct of the surveyor of the public buildings. These I shall take the liberty to notice presently. The feelings of the members eventually appeared by the appointment of a committee to wait on the President, and to request him to take effectual measures to cause the south wing of the Capitol to be prepared for the accommodation of the House of Representatives, by the commencement of the next session of Congress.

In consequence of this resolution I received from the President of the United States his most positive directions to leave no means unemployed to accomplish the desire of the House.

My conscience, and I may boldly add, the state of the works at the present moment, acquit me when I say, that no means have been neglected to accomplish the desire of the House of Representatives. In fact, if ever a sense of my own interests,—of the value to me of high professional reputation in my future prospects, and of my official and personal obligations to the Chief Magistrate of the Union, has been sensibly felt by me, it has been during the whole of the late season. During two months, I was confined by a most painful and dangerous illness, my recovery from which was beyond the expectation of all my friends,—but even this circumstance did not operate to retard the work, for such measures had been taken in advance, and were so zealously pursued by the clerk of the works, that no delay arose from my illness. That the House has not been completed, has been simply owing to this, that its completion was impossible in itself,—for it depended on circumstances which could not be controuled. It is a very obvious, though a very common mistake to suppose,—that if a certain number of workmen can erect a public building in a certain time, twice that number could erect it in half the time. In many other operations the position is true, but in architecture it is not true in any instance. The situation of the quarries I have explained,—and the failure of stone has been in a great measure the cause of our not having effected more. Could we have procured it as we wanted it, we should have been at least one month forwarder in every respect, but still the building could not have been completed. Had it been possible, what motives had I not to try to effect it? The professional station I might have taken in public confidence would indeed have been a proud one.

The difficulty in procuring stone was great : —had it been less, we should have labored under another equally so, that of procuring stone-cutters. In order to collect a sufficient number, I used my own exertions, and not unsuccessfully, in Philadelphia and Baltimore, and sent to New-York and Albany. Travelling charges to and from the city were offered by public advertisement ; the inducement of high wages was held out ; and the fact is that we did engage the majority of those who were not settled in constant work in those cities. But we did not much increase our whole number by these recruits,—for some very useful workmen left us, to undertake independent business, or were removed by sickness : and it has so happened that although the supply of stone has been so tardy, as to enable us to do much towards finishing the cornice of the House, and to do other works which might have been postponed to another season,—yet had it arrived in good time, we should have wanted hands to cut it with sufficient speed.

On this subject I will only now solicit leave to add, that if any thing I may have said during the last session of Congress bore the fair interpretation of a pledge on my part that the Hall of Representatives *could* and *should* be finished,—I am sorry that I should so far have committed myself. To many of my friends I have declared it to be impossible,—but to more,—when urged by the expressions of a strong desire to see it compleated by this time, I have evaded as well as I could, the harshness of such a declaration, in terms which may have been construed in proportion to the polite ambiguity of my language, into such a pledge.

To explain to you the facts above stated has been one of my motives for writing to you this letter. Another equally important to me is to lay

before you the history and object of the design,—and to give some account of the expense and construction of the south wing of the Capitol. When the President of the United States did me the honor to entrust to me the charge of the public buildings, I found the north wing already constructed, and a commencement made in the erection of the south wing. The designs of the public buildings at Washington were chosen from a collection obtained by public advertisement, offering a reward for the plan most approved by the then President of the United States. This mode of procuring designs of public buildings, though exceedingly common, is certain of defeating its own end. It brings into competition all the personal vanity of those who think they have knowledge and taste in an art which they have never had an opportunity to learn or practice—of all those who enticed by the reward think that personal influence and interest will procure it for them—and of all those who know of design nothing but its execution : and it keeps out of the competition all who have too much self-respect to run the race of preference with such motley companions, and especially of all regularly educated professional men,—who understand their business too well not to know that a picture is not a design, and that to form and elaborate the design of a public work so that it shall be capable of being executed from the papers they present, requires so much expense of time, labor and clerkship, as no reward that is usually offered can compensate. To obtain the most common object by advertisement would be thought absurd. Application in other cases is made to a number of persons known to understand the subject, and between them the competition is fair and honorable. On this account it would always be better to propose a very

moderate compensation to a select number of men who are known to have devoted themselves to the arts, and even to call forth men of talents out of the profession. No such would refuse to exert themselves to the utmost, knowing their competitors to be skilful as well as themselves.

In delivering to me the papers which contained the information of what was intended to be the plan of the south wing, the President required that I should give my unbiassed opinion on them—that I should propose to him my ideas,—and that I should make the drawings necessary to the construction of the work,—with this general direction, that I should deviate as little as possible from the plan approved by General Washington. The materials on which I had to work were exceedingly scanty. The exterior however was already built in the north wing, and from that there could be no deviation. I frankly confess that, excepting in a few of the details, all my ideas of good taste, and even of good sense in architecture were shocked by the style of the building. I am well aware that in what I shall say on this subject I am probably in a minority. All the books for the last three or four hundred years up to 1760, are against me, and many that have been published since stand on the same ground. But as the arts continue to be improved,—simplicity gains daily more admirers. Indeed nothing appears so clear from the general assent of all ages, as that a graceful and refined simplicity is the highest achievement of taste and of art; not only in architecture, but in poetry, in rhetoric, in dress, and in manners. The chaste and simple buildings of the best days of Athens have been considered as the work of the Gods, even by the barbarians who have despoiled them to erect their own complicated structures. Nothing is so easy as to *orna-*

ment walls with foliage, with wreaths, festoons and drapery, with pilasters and rustic piers; especially if it be not required that these things should have the remotest relation to the purpose of the building upon which they are carved, or that they should contribute to the real or apparent strength or convenience of the structure. And on this account we find ornaments increase in proportion as art declines, or as ignorance abounds. Thus in the ornaments of the splendid buildings erected in the age of Dioclesian we see horses crawling out of roses, and boys crawling into them; lions and sphinxes with tails of flowers and legs of leaves: and human heads and shoulders supporting heavy columns;—and the walls of the churches built in the dark ages are ornamented with heads of monies and cats, and with every possible distortion of the human body and countenance.

Agreeably to my own ideas on this subject, I should willingly have proposed the erection of a hall for the House of Representatives, very inconsistent with the exterior of the Capitol:—A hall great in its dimensions, plain in its proportions, and yet magnificent in its decorations. These decorations sculpture and painting might have furnished in a series of years by moderate annual appropriations, from subjects explanatory of the history, the manners, and the political institutions of our country. But in the actual appearance and shape of the building little could be done but to adhere to the style of the exterior, and to add all the conveniences of offices which were required for the transaction of the business of the House. The approbation of the President was therefore given to the plan which is executed and which I will now endeavor to explain.

The entrance to the south wing from the ground or office story will be in the recess. That

in the east front will be closed, it being intended for a window. It has been opened to the ground only for the convenience of the workmen. The outer door leads into a hall or vestibule. On the left hand is a door opening into a committee room. From the vestibule four steps lead up to the area of the staircase which is lighted from the sky, and gives light, to the entrance, to the octagon vestibule of the offices, and to the stairs. On the left hand the stairs lead up to the door of the hall of Representatives on the principal floor. The area of the staircase is connected with the vestibule of the offices, into which, on the left, a spiral staircase for the convenience of the persons coming from above to the offices, descends. A door immediately in front leads into a court which contains the pump, furnishes light to the deep part of the buildings, and contains various domestic conveniences. On the right is the entrance to the center of the building, which will be the principal and public access to the Capitol.

On the left hand of the octagon vestibule is the access to the offices, by the general passage or corridor. Immediately on entering the corridor and descending a few steps, the way to the privies is on the left, and a passage to a committee room on the right. The arched doors on each hand lead to deposits of fuel, and to the stoves which warm the hall above. This passage is crossed by a corridor running east and west. Immediately in front is the office of the clerk of the House. The center of the office is open for those who have business in it,—in each angle is a private office for the engrossing clerks, and around are six spacious vaults for the records of the House.

Returning into the corridor and proceeding to the west, you enter an antichamber, in which those who have business with committees may wait.

To the right are a small, and a large committee room, and to the left another of convenient size. The large committee room is accessible separately from the corridor. The east end of the corridor leads into another antichamber, which on the left communicates with two committee rooms, the largest of which opens also into the vestibule of entrance. On the right is the room appropriated to the use of the President of the United States, whenever he shall come to the House.

On the south front of the building near each end, are the doors of the gallery, which at present have the appearance of windows, but which will soon be cut down to the level of the other doors. Each door leads into a small lobby, from which a spiral staircase ascends to the gallery. These doors are so far distant from the entrance of the members to the House, that the inconvenience generally experienced by having only one entrance will be avoided.

This whole story of offices has been gained upon the original design, it having been intended that all the committee rooms should have been in the attic story above the hall of Representatives, or in the north wing.

As two of the committee rooms in their present state appear to be so small as to have been called *cells*, I must call your attention to the construction of the room above. These rooms are under that space which is between the columns and the wall, and unless the hall of Representatives had been contracted in order to make these two rooms larger, it was impossible to encrease their size. When they shall be finished, they will be found exceedingly commodious for those small committees of three members which are often appointed for special purposes.

The *principal* access to the hall of Representatives will be—when the Capitol shall be finished,—from the center of the building, through the small circular vestibule. But the most usual entrance will always be from the basement story, and by the stairs in the recess. These stairs land at the door of the Legislative Hall on one side, as do the spiral stairs of the offices on the other. On entering the great door of the hall, the lobby of the House extends on both sides, and is separated from the area of the House by the basement wall upon which the columns of the House are erected. The bar of the House is in the opening of this wall: opposite to it, on the other side, will be the Speaker's chair. The seats of the members will occupy the area of the House and look to the south. Behind the Speaker's chair is a small chamber appropriated to his use. The House is surrounded by a plain wall seven feet high. The 24 Corinthian columns which rise upon this wall and support the dome, are 26 feet 8 inches in height, the entablature is 6 feet high, the blocking course 1 foot 6 inches, and the dome rises 12 feet 6 inches, in all 53 feet 8 inches. The area within the wall is 85 feet 6 inches long and 60 feet 6 inches wide. The space within the external walls is 110 feet by 86 feet.

The lobby of the House is so separated from it, that those who retire to it cannot see, and probably will not distinctly hear, what is going forward in it. This arrangement has been made with the approbation of the President of the United States, and also under the advice of the Speakers of the two Houses at the time when the designs were made. It is novel, but it is supposed that the inconveniencies to which the lobby now subjects the House will be thereby avoided.

The galleries are placed in front of the members and to the right and left of the Speaker—they will on each side extend to the fifth column from the chair.

In each corner of the lobby is an office for the delivery of letters and papers, for the deposit of stationary, and for the convenience and use of the officers of the House. Out of the east corner of the lobby a door leads into a very spacious committee room.

The accommodations provided for the House are the following :—

The Hall of Representatives, with its galleries and lobbies,

The Speaker's closet,

Two offices, for the officers of the House,

Three large, and three smaller committee rooms,

The chamber of the President of the United States,

The office of the Clerk of the House, including two offices for engrossing clerks, and six depots of records,

Two common waiting rooms, or anti-chambers,

Two lobbies and staircases to the galleries,

The staircase of the House,

The stairs of the offices, leading also out to the Roof,

Three vestibules,

Ample cellars for fuel, &c.

Privies.

The construction of the Hall of Representatives was imposed by the general plan and design of the work. Whether it will be a room, in which to hear and to speak will be easy, can only be determined by actual experiment. All that

the knowledge to which I can pretend, could do, has been done to make it so, by surrounding the area with a plain surface, and raising the columns above the heads of the speakers, and I believe this attempt will be successful. Rooms encumbered with many columns and projecting cornices are not well adapted to the ease of hearing and speaking. Of this truth the Chamber of the Senate is perhaps the most striking proof that can be adduced. But it will be evident to you at first sight, that the original plan,—with a proper regard to consistency in the work,—and I may say,—the indispensable construction of the interior as dictated by the exterior, rendered some such room as has been built unavoidable. That it will be a splendid room,—probably the most splendid Legislative Hall that has ever been erected,—is certain : and it will also be extremely convenient in its arrangement, and remarkably warm in winter and cool in summer.

The whole of the wing excepting the dome of the Legislative Hall is vaulted. It was originally intended that this dome should also be turned in bricks, and the construction is such that it may at any time, should the present dome of timber decay, be covered with a brick or stone dome. The present roof however will last for many years, it is less expensive than a brick dome would have been, and took less time in its construction.

Independently of the permanence which, perhaps, constitutes the principal excellence of a vaulted building, and which renders the House, almost equal in durability with the life, of a nation, there is another practical reason for vaulting buildings of great mass. The walls of these buildings must necessarily be so thick and so high as to require a considerable time before they become dry. All timbers therefore that are inserted in these walls

are liable to rot, and to this cause the general rottenness of the timber of the north wing is to be ascribed ;—for though the rot has extended along the beams, it has, in all the cases which I have examined, originated in the wall.

The expenditure in the south wing of the Capitol has from time to time been reported to the President of the United States, but I will take the liberty to recall it to your recollection,—by a brief recapitulation.

Of the appropriation of 50,000 dollars in 1803, was expended in that year on objects other than the south wing,	-	-	10,321 00 $\frac{1}{2}$
Of the appropriation of 50,000 dollars in 1804, on other objects,			12,617 52
Of the appropriation of			
1805,	-	-	110,000
do. of 1806,			40,000
			<hr/>
			150,000

There remains as nearly as the unsettled state of the accounts will permit to be ascertained,—to be expended towards the completion of the work,	-	-	11,000
			<hr/>
			33,938 52 $\frac{1}{2}$

Which sums being deducted from the whole amount of the appropriations,	\$ 250,000	
Leave a balance of	\$ 216,061 47 $\frac{1}{2}$	
	<hr/>	

Which balance appears to be the amount expended in the erection of the south wing and of the recess. It also includes the whole expense of pulling down and removing the building occupied by Congress, until the year 1804, and the value

of the materials on hand. These are in most articles sufficient for the completion of the wing. Their value exceeds the sum of 10,000 dollars.

At the latter end of the year 1804, there had been expended in the south wing 77,061 28 $\frac{1}{2}$, and the appropriations were entirely exhausted. An estimate was then required by the committee of the House, of the sum which would be wanted to compleat the wing, and the sum of 134,300 dollars was stated to be the result of the calculations then made, under all the difficulties of accurately estimating so complicated a work in the state it was then in, and which has been carried on under so many disadvantages since, as to baffle accurate estimation altogether.

Towards defraying the expense of the works contemplated in this estimate, there has been appropriated the sum of - \$ 150,000

Of which remains in hand about 11,000

139,000

It is therefore clear that already the expense overruns the estimate 4,700 dollars, and the work is not yet completed. The principal works which remain to be done, of the body of the wing, are the covering of the roof, all the plaisterers work and painting, and some of the carpenter's work, great part of which is already put up, and most of the rest is executed. In the recess the upper part is to be carried up and covered in. There are provided already,—all the materials for the roof,—the lime and sand for the plaistering, all the freestone for the recess, the greatest part of which is wrought,—the stone for carrying up the recess,—the lumber necessary to finish the carpenter's work which is still to be done : so that to purchase materials, the further expenditure cannot be

considerable. But credit ought to be given to the south wing, for the greatest part of the materials for the new roof of the north wing, which will be absolutely required in the course of the next season, and which are now provided, and also for the glass beyond the demands of the south wing, and which it was necessary to provide. These credits amount to about 5,000 dollars. To finish the work will therefore require a further appropriation, which I have stated at 25,000 dollars.

In respect to the expense it may boldly be affirmed that it has to a single dollar been most economically, most faithfully, and if the construction of the building be good, I may add, judiciously laid out. What has been done, excepting those parts necessarily made of wood, will be as permanent as the hill on which the building is erected,—and to alter or pull down, will in the course of a few years be quite as laborious an undertaking as it has been to erect.

The comparison of the expenditures on the south wing of the Capitol, with those on the north, I should omit, from delicacy to those concerned in that erection, were I not entirely released from any hesitation in this respect by the attacks which have been made upon me by name in newspapers, and through me, upon the administration under which I have acted. Although these publications are undeserving of any serious answer, they will have had the good effect,—to bring before you a view of these expenses, and enable you to judge in how far the confidence of the President has been abused, or justified, in the manner in which the public money has been laid out.

By reference to the books in the office of the superintendant of the city of Washington, it will appear,

that prior to the year 1803 there had
been expended on the Capitol, \$ 337,735 38

Add the sum necessary to finish
the capitals of the pilasters which in
the south wing are finished, 2,000

In the year 1803 was
expended in repairs of the
north wing, 2,681 57

Since 1803, 620 18

————— 3,301 75

—————
\$ 343,037 13
—————

From this sum must be deduct-
ed a portion of the sum expended
prior to 1803, on the foundations of
the whole building. This expendi-
ture amounted to \$ 50,135 31.
The foundations of the north wing
contain considerably more than one-
third of the whole,—on account of
the numerous internal walls, which
did not exist in the south or center
part of the work. Two thirds of this
is \$ 33,423 81 cents, of which cre-
dit the north wing with

30,000

—————
\$ 313,037 13

If from this sum be deducted
the cost of the south wing hitherto,
as above,

216,061 47
—————

There remains in favor of the
south wing

\$ 97,975 66
—————

And on supposition that beyond
the sum of 11,000 still in hand, the
further sum of 25,000 be required

entirely to finish the south wing, deduct

36,000

Then there will be still a balance
in favor of the south wing of

£ 60,975 66 $\frac{1}{2}$

In comparing the construction of the north wing with the south within the external walls, it is evident, that in the latter no expensive construction has been avoided which could conduce to the permanence, or convenience of the work, while in the former the construction of every part is of the least expensive kind, which could be decently executed. In the former all the floors from the cellar to the roof are of timber; in the latter all is arched solidly, and the greatest part of the arches are groined.

On the ground floor of the north wing, including lobbies and stairs, are 12 apartments,—in the south are 22 apartments, lobbies and stairs, and 11 depots of records, and fuel cellars of cheaper construction; in all 33. Now though these apartments are of lesser size the quantity of walling is thereby exceedingly increased. It is almost unnecessary to point out the difference of construction in further detail,—between stone columns supporting solid entablatures enriched with sculpture, and columns of scantling and lath and plaister, capitals cast of plaister of Paris, and entablatures of wooden framing, plaistered and stuccoed,—between wooden stairs and stone staircases, between studded lath and plaister partitions and solid walling, &c.

It must be further considered that although the exterior appearance of the two wings is the same, the thickness of the walls of the south wing is much greater, and also, that the price of the free-

stone has risen about 33 per cent. since the erection of the north wing.

The quantity of freestone employed in the south wing is 4,753 tons, the cost of which has been \$ 37,533 73 cents, or at an average nearly eight dollars per ton, whereas the stone employed on the north wing was contracted for at an average of less than six dollars per ton.

To the expense of the north wing it would not be unfair to add the sum that will be necessary to render it as permanently convenient, safe and useful as the south wing :—and there is no doubt, but that there will be a balance of above 100,000 dollars in favor of the latter, when both shall be perfectly completed.

Whatever merit there may be in the manner in which the work executed by the direction of the present Chief Magistrate of the Union, has been performed, I am very far from being so presumptuous or unjust as to claim as solely mine. The warm interest which the President has taken in every thing that related to the design, arrangement, and management of the work,—and to that impulse which a mind by whom no field of art or science has been unexplored, gives to all the agents he employs,—more is due than delicacy permits me to express. On the intelligent activity and integrity of the clerk of the works, Mr. John Lenthall, it is impossible to bestow too high commendations. In every department of the execution men have been employed in whose skill and honesty every confidence could be placed,—and the work has proceeded with a degree of zeal, and of harmony among all who are engaged in it,—that has rendered the labor of study, design, and direction a task of infinite interest and pleasure.

Before I conclude,—I will still solicit your patience, while I candidly confess, that independently

of my wish to explain to you the circumstances of the public buildings in this city, I have also been induced to write to you this letter by personal motives. Extremely scurrilous publications and very unpleasant remarks out of doors have attributed to me a deliberate design to protract the term of building,—and of neglecting to give sufficient personal attendance upon it.

Against the first imputation, I appeal to the accounts which prove, that excepting in the year 1805, in which 130,000 dollars were appropriated, there has not, at the conclusion of any season, remained a sufficient balance of the appropriation to carry on the work, or to continue me in office for another year. Against the second I appeal to the works themselves. I cannot blame any one who on this subject forms an honest though an erroneous and an injurious opinion, excepting for the neglect of enquiry. I shall content myself at present with the bare statement, that from the general design of the work, and its whole arrangement, down to the minutest part of its detail in execution, and the most insignificant moulding, directions in drawing or writing in my own hand are at any time to be seen in the office,—and that my personal attendance has been such, as to have made the expenses of my office for the three last years exceed my salary as surveyor of the public buildings: and had it not been for employment in other departments, my services to the public would not only have been gratuitous, but I should have paid for rendering them. Having freely accepted the appointment, with the previous knowledge of the salary annexed to it,—I have no right to complain, nor do I complain. I merely state the fact. Motives in which the desire of making money, or even the hope of acquiring fame did not enter, have induced me to act as I

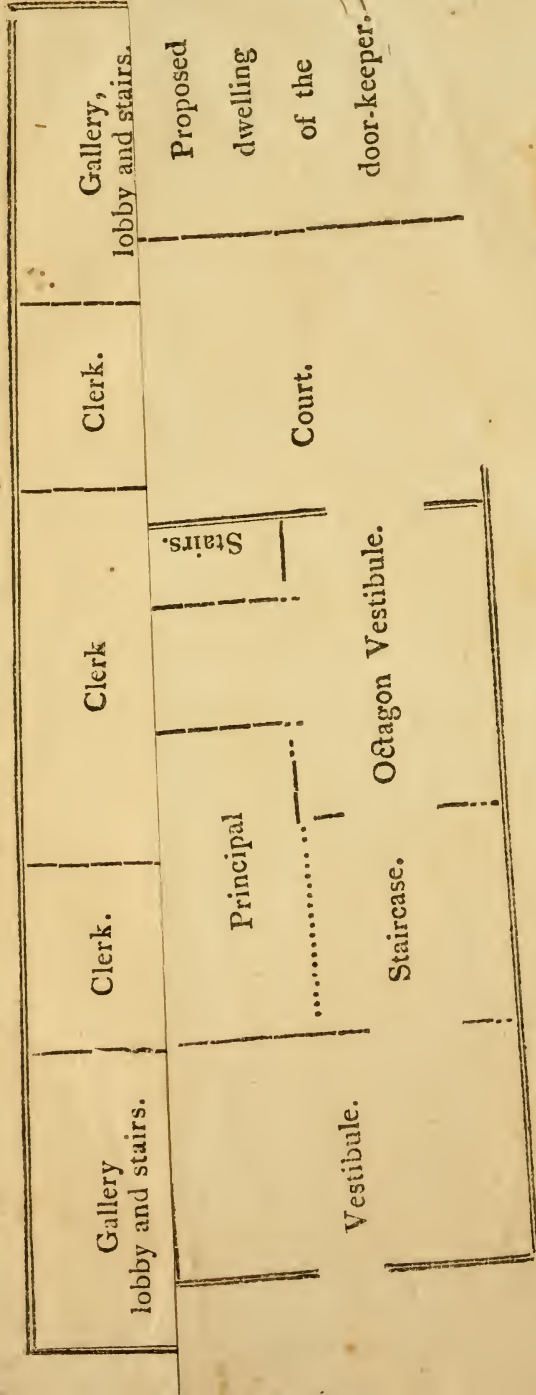
have done. Interested considerations, and certainly both my duty and my attachment to my family would forbid my further continuance in the service of the United States, were not arrangements to be made which would reconcile my residence in Washington with my plainest interests. I regret having been obliged to say so much of myself; to notice in print, much more to answer, *printed* abuse, is to give to it an importance, which the good sense of the public very generally denies it. But in this case, I hope the impossibility of personal explanation to *each* member,—will authorise the little I have said.

I am,

With much respect, your's,

B. HENRY LATROBE.

SOUTH FRONT.



Arrangement of the office story of the House of Representatives, at Washington.



